

Strictly Confidential
Not for release

August 31, 1945

MEMORANDUM:

Approximately twenty-six (26) applications for branches for Bank of America National Trust and Savings Association are now pending, raising once more the question of permitting further expansion of this branch system in California.

Following the policy formulated by the late President Roosevelt, it has been the practice of this office during the past six years to restrain as much as possible the growth of monopoly in West Coast banking and credit facilities which seems inherent in the expansionist program of the Bank of America and Transamerica, both of which are dominated by the so-called Giannini interests. This policy of restraint has received the active support and cooperation of both the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. It is deemed appropriate to set forth very briefly the bases of this general policy, without specifying in detail the supervisory problems which have been encountered in carrying it out.

Bank of America operates through two so-called main offices and almost five hundred branches throughout the State of California - many times more branches than any other bank in the United States. For some years, its deposits have grown more rapidly than those of any other bank in the country. In total resources, it is the second largest bank in the world, and is rapidly overtaking the Chase National Bank of New York, the only larger bank in existence. In fact, it already has several times as many depositors as Chase or any other bank; it has more business-loans outstanding than any other bank; and whereas Chase is one of a number of huge "corporation" banks in the nation's financial center, which could be replaced by the numerous other large banks located there, Bank of America is a Titan whose activities cover an immense state and affect the whole West Coast, and whose collapse and replacement would involve an economically destructive upheaval.

The following figures bring out the situation clearly: Bank of America's deposits on June 30, 1945 were \$4,500,000,000, constituting approximately 40% of all deposits in California banks. Its approximately five

hundred branches amount to almost half of the banking offices of the state, and are located in over 300 communities. There were 595 banks and branches in the Transamerica bank group on June 30, 1945, located in Arizona, California, Nevada, Oregon and Washington, out of a total of 1,461 banks and branches in those five states. The Transamerica banks and branches constituted approximately 50% of all banking offices in California, 60% in Nevada, and 34% in Oregon. They held approximately 41% of all bank deposits in California, 79% of all deposits in Nevada, and 41% in Oregon.

Throughout their history, Bank of America and Transamerica Corporation have been dominated by a small group of men who have pursued an aggressive and ruthless policy of expansion, and have engaged in a variety of banking and non-banking activities, some being of a highly speculative character. The management of the bank has been of the promotional type, and the results of its lack of conservatism became apparent in the early 1930's, when its condition was such as to create considerable doubt as to whether it should be permitted to resume operations after the banking holiday. It was only consideration of

the serious effect on the whole West Coast which forced a reluctant decision to permit the Bank of America to reopen at that time. Today its condition is very much improved - by virtue of general economic and war conditions, not by virtue of management. A study of the development of the Giannini empire even during the last twelve years will disclose that the promotional attitude still predominates.

In the light of this brief description, it will not be difficult to see the application of certain basic principles and policies which render it inappropriate, except to meet compelling local need, for the Comptroller to authorize Bank of America to establish additional branch offices. First of these principles is the American government policy against monopoly, unfair competition, and absentee ownership, and in favor of small businesses, free competition, and local ownership and control. The Comptroller is not charged with the enforcement of the anti-trust laws, but he should and does exercise his discretionary power in the light of the purposes which the statutes in this field were designed to achieve.

The opportunity to monopolize the field and prevent the development of new competition is greater in banking than in most industrial and commercial fields. Furthermore,

monopoly in banking is singularly dangerous because of the influence banks exercise over the entire economy through control of credit and liquid funds.

Even apart from the foregoing, the potential disastrous effects of a failure of a branch-bank system of such magnitude render inadvisable the authorization of further expansion of its branch network. Bank of America is in relatively sound condition today and its failure within the foreseeable future is improbable. However, supervisory authorities must always bear in mind the possibility of bank failures due to rapid changes in economic conditions or to unsound and speculative management, and policies should be adopted which will minimize the harm resulting from the collapse of any one institution. The primary obligation of the Comptroller, in exercising his discretion regarding the chartering of new banks, the granting of branch permits, etc., is the maintenance of a safe and sound banking system. Any further growth of Bank of America - and consequent increased dominance in California banking - is undesirable from this point of view.

The enormous importance of banks to modern industrial life gives rise to another danger implicit in the existence of a banking institution of the unparalleled power and extent

of Bank of America. Banking has long been recognized as a matter requiring governmental supervision and control, and the federal statutes provide general sanctions designed to enable the supervisory authorities to maintain safe and sound banking practices and to prevent violations of the banking laws. Unfortunately, these sanctions - for example, the forfeiture of a bank's charter - are extremely drastic. Where a single bank is badly managed, or resistant to proper supervisory requirements, these sanctions can be brought to bear, and this possibility alone is sufficient to make the vast majority of banks receptive to criticisms, corrections, and recommendations. But any responsible official hesitates to invoke such sanctions where the offending bank furnishes a major part of the banking facilities of a great State; the hazards involved in mere unfavorable rumors regarding a bank make bank supervisors reluctant even to threaten the use of a serious sanction. Being fully aware of this situation, the management of a mammoth, many-branched institution can sometimes defy governmental regulation, and violate almost with impunity the laws enacted by Congress for its control and the protection of the public. The history of Bank

of America reveals just such a situation and attitude.

Even in the case of a branch bank system of comparable size with an outstanding record of safe, sound and conservative management, the foregoing principles would dictate the greatest caution in the handling of applications for new branches. The fact that the record of Bank of America cannot be so characterized simply renders more imperative the policy which the Comptroller has followed in this case.

In regard to the twenty-six (26) applications for branches with which we are presently confronted, no departure is contemplated from the basic policy of restraining all possible any further expansion of the Giannini banking interests. Some twenty (20) of these applications can and should be rejected. However, in approximately a half dozen cases the communities involved are entitled to more adequate banking accommodation, and careful investigation fails to reveal any practical method of securing such additional accommodation save through granting to the Bank of America permission to establish branches at these points.

There is considerable pressure from these communities and from their representatives in Congress. For six years

there has been no increase in the number of branches of the Bank of America, although during that period this state, which permits branch banking, has grown enormously in population and financial resources and permits in considerable number have been granted to competing institutions.

In the light of these facts it would seem judicious to authorize branches of the Bank of America in the few exceptional cases mentioned. To refuse would penalize the local communities involved and might give some weight to the charge of arbitrary and prejudicial conduct of this office.

A brief resume of thirteen (13) of the pending applications is attached hereto. The balance are still under investigation by field representatives.


Preston Delano

August 13, 1945

BANK OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRUST & SAVINGS ASSOCIATION

BRANCH APPLICATIONS

1. Manchester and Crenshaw Boulevards
Inglewood, Los Angeles County

Date: 4-11-45

Population: 30,000

Existing facilities: Branch of Bank of America
Branch of Security-First Nat. Bank
Branch of Citizens National Trust &
Savings Bank within one block
of proposed site of this
application

DECISION: Should be rejected as area already
has adequate banking service.

- - - - -

2. Wilshire Blvd. and Fairfax Ave.,
City of Los Angeles

Date: 4-18-45

Population: 63,000 estimated in this locality

Existing facilities: This area is now being served by
thirteen (13) banking units, the
national bank units of which are
5 branches of Bank of America
2 branches of Citizens National T&S Bank
1 branch of Security-First National Bank
1 branch of Bank of America is four (4)
short blocks from Wilshire & Fairfax

DECISION: Should be rejected as area already has
adequate banking service.

3. **Magnolia Boulevard and Hollywood Way,
Burbank, California**

Date: 4-24-45

Population: 34,000

Existing facilities: None in immediate area
Two branches of Bank of America -
One of Security-First National and
One of California Bank within radius
of 2 miles.

DECISION: Although close, should probably be granted. ①
The particular locality in which it is proposed
to establish this branch is in need of banking
service, and a branch would serve a public
need.

- - - - -

4. **Crenshaw Boulevard and Rodeo Road,
City of Los Angeles**

Date: 4-25-45

Population: Population of this area difficult to estimate
as examiner concludes proposed branch would
only be of service to a circle with radius of
600 yards.

Existing facilities: 3 branches of Bank of America are
within two (2) miles, and one branch
is within 4 1/2 miles of this location.
Security-First National is establishing
branch less than one mile from this
location.

DECISION: Should be rejected as area has adequate
banking facilities.

5. Pacific Ave. and Pine St.,
Stockton, California

Date: 4-30-45

Population: Area 12,000 to 15,000

Existing facilities: No banks in this trading area.

DECISION: Should be granted. American Trust Company has
already been granted permission by the State
Superintendent to establish a branch in this
vicinity but the concentration of population
indicates that two branches can be supported.

②

- - - - -

6. Lynwood, California

Date: 5-5-45

Population: 10,000

Existing facilities: Branch of Security-First National Bank

DECISION: Should be rejected. Entire community is primarily
residential. With the return to normal postwar
conditions, it appears highly improbable that
public necessity will require other than existing
banking facilities. Examiner Goddard doubts that
two branches are justified, particularly in view
of the large number of banking offices within a
short radius of this town.

Within a radius of five (5) miles there are:
10 branches of Bank of America
6 branches of other banks
2 independent banks

7. San Gabriel, California

Date: 5-10-45

(3)

Population: 11,000

Existing facilities: 1 branch of California Bank

DECISION: Should be granted. There is a real need for additional banking facilities here. The one branch of the California Bank does not meet the situation. ✓

- - - - -

8. Costa Mesa,
Orange County.

Date: 5-11-45

Population: Normally 2,500; war activities have increased it to 5,000. Costa Mesa is an unincorporated village at the junction point of two highways about 14 miles south of Long Beach.

Existing facilities: Branch of Bank of America at Newport Beach 2 miles away and at Balboa 4 miles distant. Many other banking facilities within 7 miles.

DECISION: Should be rejected. District Chief Irwin Wright comments "The present business boom in this village is obviously of a temporary nature, and with the cessation of hostilities there will be a contraction in business and population to the point where maintenance of a branch bank would be wholly unjustifiable."

9. Wilshire Boulevard and Fourteenth St.,
Santa Monica, California

Date: 5-11-45

Population: 25,000 in area

Existing facilities: One state bank
2 branches of Security-First Nat. Bank
1 branch of California Bank
1 branch of Bank of America

DECISION: Should be rejected as area already
has adequate banking service.

- - - - -

10. American Avenue and Anaheim Street,
Long Beach, Los Angeles County.

Date: 5-18-45

Population: The 1940 figure was 50,000, wartime activities
have increased this figure to about 62,000.

Existing facilities: 3 branches of Bank of America
2 branches of Security-First Nat. Bank
California State Department has just
authorized branch of California Bank.

DECISION: Should be rejected. Careful survey fails to
disclose the need for additional banking
facilities.

11. Lower Lake,
Lake County, California

④

Date: 6-8-45

Population: 1,500

Existing facilities: None

DECISION: Should be granted. This community
is entitled to branch service.

- - - - -

12. Glendale Park District
Glendale, Los Angeles County.

Date: 6-20-45

Population: 16,000 area

Existing facilities: 1 national bank and branch thereof
2 branches of Bank of America
2 branches of Security-First Nat. Bank

DECISION: Should be rejected. The Glendale Park
District is a residential district so closely
tied in with the business district of
Glendale that a branch at that point is in
the opinion of the examiner unjustified.
There appears to be no reason to believe that
residents in the proposed area will refrain
from customary habit of going to town to
conduct banking or other business.

3

13. Sherman Oaks
Los Angeles County

Date: 8-20-45

Population: 20,000

Existing facilities: Banking "facility" (as distinguished
from branch) of Bank of America.

DECISION: Should be granted. Because of close of
hostilities this "facility" now being
terminated and should be replaced by a
branch.